

DOC HASTINGS

4TH DISTRICT, WASHINGTON

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

March 27, 2007

Mr. Steve Wright
Administrator and CEO
Bonneville Power Administration
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, OR 97232

Mr. Bob Lohn
Northwest Regional Administrator
NOAA-Fisheries
7600 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115

Brigadier General Gregg Martin
Commander and Northwestern Division Engineer
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box 2870
Portland, OR 97208

Dear Sirs:

I write to express my strong opposition to a drawdown of the John Day Reservoir as part of a revised operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS).

It has been reported recently that the federal action agencies are contemplating a significant drawdown of the John Day pool as part of the settlement discussion with state governments and treaty tribes involved in the litigation over the Endangered Species Act and the operation of the FCRPS. A drawdown of the reservoir to the Minimum Operating Pool (MOP) would have dramatic negative impacts on irrigation, power production, recreation, and wildlife.

Under such a proposal, the John Day reservoir would be moved from the normal operating level of 267 feet to below the Minimum Irrigation Pool elevation of 262.5 feet down to the MOP of 257 feet. This would leave tens of thousands of acres of productive farmland – a major contributor to the area's economy – without water. By removing some of the flexibility of the hydrosystem, a John Day drawdown could add an estimated ten million dollars annually to regional power costs. In addition, this proposal could remove the source of cooling water used to operate the nearby Boardman power plant. More than 20 irrigation pump intakes would have to be extended further into the river, costing millions of dollars and adding to pumping costs. Federal participation in a project of this magnitude would likely require express congressional authorization.

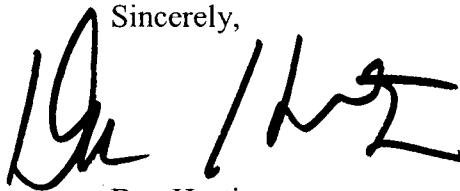
The drawdown proposal would also require significant modifications to fish ladders at both John Day Dam and McNary Dam. The lower reservoir may also impede adult fish passage at the mouth of the Umatilla River. This proposal would have clear negative impacts on resident fish and wildlife. The loss of the existing wildlife refuge provided by the current reservoir could not easily be mitigated and would require perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars to acquire additional federal land for the purpose of creating wetlands elsewhere. This at a time when the federal government does not adequately compensate local governments for the non-taxable land it already manages.

There are considerable impacts from this proposal to recreation and transportation that also concern me. Boat ramps and docks that are important to support tourism in the area would clearly need expensive modifications to be usable. In addition, I am concerned that this concept would hamper river navigation and impact the stability of area railroad beds, both of which are critical to our region's transportation system.

Compared to the clear and exorbitant costs of the John Day drawdown proposal, the alleged benefits to salmon are uncertain at best. When this issue was considered a decade ago, the Clinton Administration properly concluded that moving the non-barged juveniles 12 to 36 hours faster into the estuary – where thousands of birds and other predators congregate – was simply not worth the cost or risk. There remains no scientific evidence to support a link between travel time through the hydrosystem and salmon survival.

If the federal agencies and litigants involved in these discussions have scientific justification for taking such a proposal seriously, I strongly urge all involved to come forward with the studies and analysis that support this concept. With the future operation of one of our region's most important environmental and economic assets at stake, the Congress and the public have a right to know about the science contributing to these significant federal decisions. This is especially the case if taxpayers are going to be asked to foot the bill. A policy decision of this magnitude should be fully aired with those most directly affected by it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Doc Hastings', written in a cursive style.

Doc Hastings
Member of Congress